Global Challenges and Opportunities for Physical Education Teacher Educators

Mary O'Sullivan

To cite this article: Mary O'Sullivan (2021) Global Challenges and Opportunities for Physical Education Teacher Educators, Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 92:3, 327-338, DOI: 10.1080/02701367.2020.1730295

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2020.1730295

Published online: 25 Mar 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 329

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Global Challenges and Opportunities for Physical Education Teacher Educators

Mary O’Sullivan

University of Limerick

ABSTRACT

This McCloy Lecture sheds light on the “hidden profession” of Physical Education Teacher Educators (PETEs) by sharing my perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by PETE scholars and teachers globally. I begin with an overview of my biography and how it has influenced my thinking about PETE. I present some scholarly critiques of PETE, a selection of PETE research findings and address key policy issues within teacher education across several national educational systems describing how Physical Education teacher educators manage (or not) the challenges and opportunities in the practice of teacher education in modern-day universities. I draw on data from my international study of experienced Physical Education teacher educators about the nature of their work in academe and the status of physical education teacher education locally, nationally and globally. I also draw on the perspectives of Irish teacher educators about the challenges of being active producers and users of research in a challenging national policy context. I conclude with a set of observations about how best to build capacity among Physical Education teacher educators so they can thrive as research active and innovative teachers in the modern university.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 October 2019
Accepted 12 February 2020

KEYWORDS

Physical education; teacher education; PETE

It was a privilege to deliver the Charles Henry McCloy lecture at 2019 SHAPE America and I thank the Research Consortium for the honor. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the “hidden profession” of Physical Education Teacher Educators (PETEs) and share a global perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by PETE scholars and teachers. Sport pedagogy is a field of study involving research on teaching and learning of physical activity and sport across the lifespan in school community and social media settings. My intent is to engage readers on the potential futures for Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) and Physical Education teacher educators, a subfield of Sport Pedagogy. I address structural issues for teacher education (accreditation, levels of programmatic control, and relationships with stakeholders) across national educational systems and how Physical Education teacher educators manage (or not) the challenges and opportunities in modern-day universities. I draw on data from our international interview study of experienced Physical Education teacher educators (O’Sullivan, Parker, MacPhail, & Tannehill, 2018) about the nature of their work in academe and the status of physical education teacher education locally, nationally and globally. It also draws on the perspectives of Irish teacher educators about the challenges of being active producers and users of research (MacPhail & O’Sullivan, 2019) and an international cohort of early career sport pedagogy academics about their career ambitions and challenges in the modern university (Enright, Alfrey, & Rynne, 2017).

Who was C. H. McCloy?

First, it is important to reflect on Charles Henry McCloy, a pioneering physical education scholar and teacher in the USA and China and 2019 was the 60th anniversary of his death. McCloy worked in China for 13 years. In 2016, Dr Bill McCloy (then Professor of Mandarin at U of Hawaii) was invited by the Chinese to the University of Nanjing to a celebration of the contribution of his grandfather to the development of Physical Education in China. McCloy worked in several US States before settling at the University of Iowa for the last 29 of his life. McCloy was a generalist scholar gaining a master degree in Sociology and his PHD in Physical Education at the age of 46 at Teachers College where his research focused on the motor skill competence and physical fitness for children. McCloy published 32 books and 290 articles, writing for specialist and nonspecialist audiences and supervised 46 doctoral dissertations and 230 master theses. He held many leadership roles including AAHPERD President and was the first person to receive the Luther Gulick Award. The National Academy of Kinesiology (NAK) honored him with the Hetherington Award. I recommend Cardinal’s (2015)
Influences and influencers on my own professional life

Like McCloy, there were many influencers on my scholarly thinking. Daryl Siedentop was my doctoral advisor who became a colleague and friend and I dedicate these remarks to him. In 1980 Daryl offered me a Graduate Teaching Assistantship at Ohio State University and he was an exemplar of professional and scholarly standards. My doctoral peers, Hans van der Mars, Melissa Parker, Richard Tinning, and Ken Alexander helped develop my critical thinking and shape my understandings of teacher education. My first assistant professor role was at the University of Victoria, BC and in 1986 I returned to OSU to work with Daryl, and along with early career scholars Deborah Tannehill and Sandy Stroot I was provided a research-rich environment for supporting Physical Education teachers practice and expanding the scholarship of PETE. The gifted doctoral students in Canada, USA, and Ireland kept me intellectually honest and enriched my thinking. Recently, at the University of Limerick the talented Irish Physical Education teachers and policymakers grounded me in the realities and possibilities for innovation in Physical Education. My scholarly outputs are borne from collaborations with teachers and scholars who shared a passion for teaching, teachers, and teacher education. Such academic and professional environments are often fragile but, in my case, were sustained with reciprocal respect (and enjoyment!) among colleagues, self-reflection and a willingness to rethink perspectives, sometimes requiring us move outside our curricular and/or ideological zones of comfort. Our research teams enabled us to tackle what Lawson (2018) calls the wicked problems in our field … I will comment more on this later.

The following are just three of the experiences that shaped my thinking about PETE. The first was a conversation with Siedentop following his return in 1980s from a speaking engagement to Ohio Physical Education teachers. He had encouraged teachers to consider how the goals for Physical Education required a commitment to schoolwide physical activity initiatives beyond the Physical Education instructional time. He was shaken (and he was a tough scholar to shake!) by a negative reception to his ideas around curricular change. Those same ideas were the precursor to what is now Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) in the USA. A few years later the doctoral work of Pam Bechtel, Clive Pope, and Gary Kinchin highlighted the challenges in supporting and sustaining innovative curricular changes with Physical Education teachers. These teachers had no access to continuing professional development (CPD) in Physical Education thus leaving them unaware of curriculum and pedagogical innovations such as Sport Education, cooperative learning, etc. My learning was that one-shot workshops (however good) rarely lead to sustained change in teaching and learning contexts. Instead, we learned the value of building teacher knowledge and capacities via teacher-led networks and supported (as needed) by external facilitators to support them to plan and innovate in context-specific ways. These learnings led to sustained collaboration with Physical Education teachers after receiving one the first of two Federal Physical Education for Progress (PEP) grants to build teacher capacity and improve student learning in Physical Education in a large suburban school district in Ohio. We shared the evidence base from this work built an evidence base for a set of principles for effective continuing professional development (CPD) work with and by teachers (Ward & O’Sullivan, 2006).

A second learning was from a presentation to Columbus legislators sharing evidence on the value of supporting CPD for Physical Education teachers. It was St Patrick’s Day and they were more interested in my Irish accent than the substance of our CPD message. In contrast, Judy Rink had persuaded State Legislators to create a Physical Education policy framework with accountability for quality physical education programs across the state. Judy pioneered US Physical Education policy work and my learning was that while research evidence may be hugely important, it is not sufficient (and sometimes not considered) to shape public policy. Engaging with policymakers is labor intensive but can impact the discourse and shape public policy. SHAPE’s national and state leadership around advocacy should not be underestimated.

The third experience was when Larry Locke sought to persuade the National Academy of Kinesiology (NAK) to focus on Physical Education/Physical Activity policy for its annual meeting. The proposal was rejected out of hand as peers saw policy work as daunting with limited power in Kinesiology to influence government bureaucrats. Professional life was already busy and policy work not seen as a smart road to travel in building a publications portfolio in support of academic promotion. Dodds (2006) described the policy research in PETE as a “murky world [that is] complex, convoluted, confusing and contentious” (p. 540), which may account for the dearth of research on Physical Education and PETE policy in the United States. While I understood the Academy’s rejection of a focus policy work and its potential to impact Kinesiology my convection was that policy matters with a direct impact on our practices and discourses in Physical Education and
teacher education. Those involved in the accreditation of Physical Education programs (by NCATE, etc.) know well-
such implications for practice and funding of Kinesiology
programs. The early Physical Education and Physical Activity policy research by Evans and Penny in the UK
and the teacher education policy research by Cochran
Smith, Zeichner, and Darling Hammond in USA high-
lighted the critical importance for teacher educators of
engaging with policy work. Concepts such as policy slippage
(Penny & Evans, 1999) and outsourcing of education ser-
VICES (Ball, 2012; Powell, 2015) shaped my thinking about
teacher education, teacher educators’ work with teachers
and external provision of school Physical Education glob-
ally. In contrast to working in a large federal education
system like the USA, a small country like Ireland provides
opportunities to impact policy and practice as relationships
between academics, policymakers, and teachers are easier
to establish and maintain. The PETE team at the University
of Limerick has influenced policy and practice related to
the national Physical Education curriculum and Physical
Education teachers’ professional development. Several
Irish and international colleagues decamped to Limerick
and, together with talented doctoral students, they support
talented Physical Education teachers who have created
innovative developments in Irish Physical Education.
Irish PETE programs are preparing a generation of
Physical Education teachers to support the innovative
work of teachers and Physical Education CPD providers
working with government-supported Physical Education
initiatives.

**PETE and the global context of higher education**

The Irish PETE community includes teacher educators
working in two separate though related primary and
secondary teacher education systems that present differ-
ent work demands in terms of teaching and research
productivity. There is a growing Irish PETE community
who is research active and innovative working within
a system where teaching is still held in high esteem and
government policy remains supportive of research rich
university-based teacher education centers of excellence
(Sahlberg, Furlong, & Munn, 2012). Irish PETE is
a potential exemplar for other PETE jurisdictions though
there are challenges for teacher education here too
(Gleeson, Sugrue, & O’Flaherty, 2017; MacPhail &
O’Sullivan, 2019). In Ireland as elsewhere, significant
attention by policymakers to teacher education and its
role in preparing high-quality teachers has resulted in
challenges to university-based teacher education with
increasing accountability measures. In some instances,
contradictory policies from Government agencies seek,
on the one hand, to hold university-based teacher educa-
tion to account given significant levels of public invest-
ment in education while on the other hand, lack of
credibility by some politicians in universities to deliver
quality teachers has seen the growth of deregulation with
multiple pathways to teaching qualifications. The com-
ments of the authors of *Rethinking Teacher Education* are
still relevant today: “teacher education has been at the
receiving end of rafts of government initiatives which
have been designed to bring order and control to educa-
tion, a social institution which is central to a knowledge

In the USA and England, we have seen the introd-
cution of multiple pathways to a teaching qualification
including exclusive school-based teacher preparation
paths often with limited pedagogical study and/or
engagement with university teacher education. In
England, government policy has shifted to school-based
teacher education funding schools directly to recruit and
prepare teachers for their school contexts. A number of
schools create a School Alliance pooling their resources to
recruit and prepare teachers to staff their schools. They
can attract prospective teachers by providing salaries or
grants while learning to teach on-site. While recruits are
intended to be above the school quota for teachers (i.e.
supernumery teachers) a teacher supply crisis has seen
many pre-service teachers take on fulltime teaching very
early in their teacher preparation. Many universities are
now external providers of teacher education services for
these School Alliances with a funding model making
teacher education less viable. As a consequence of this
English government policy, several universities closed
teacher education programs (including PETE programs)
as they were not fiscally viable. Ellis and McNicholl (2015)
wrote of the unintended consequences of this approach
that “afford and constrain different kinds of development
for teachers, different types of and qualities of learning-
and why this matters” (p. 9).

**Critiques of PETE**

Physical education teacher education (PETE) has not
been immune to criticism globally (Lawson, 2018;
McKay, Gore, & Kirk, 1990; Tinning, 2000). Ayers and
Richards (2019) suggested USA Physical Education tea-
cher education is at a tipping point with under enrollment
threatening the viability of the field with survival of USA
PETE in major institutions of higher education ques-
tioned. There have been other critiques of the quality of
teacher education and how programs fail to prepare tea-
chers for the realities of modern school life and not many
Physical Education teachers have come to the defense of
teacher education in these debates.
One critique is that PETE has a dominant focus on technical aspects of teaching rather than on preparing culturally competent educators who can appreciate who is privileged and marginalized in Physical Education and who aspire to being agents of change (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997; Lawson & MacPhail, In Press; Tinning, 2000). Another critique concerns PETE’s inability to diversify its teaching recruits and PETE staff to reflect the diversity of the contemporary populations in schools. Social justice scholars argue teacher education and PETE specifically need to do more to prepare teachers as active agents of change in increasingly diverse schools and family contexts (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018). A third critique has been the call (most vocal in USA) to refocus PETE programs to better support a public health agenda and a more healthy and fit population. An element of that agenda promotes school-wide physical activity for students and staff complimenting the goals of a health-related Physical Education (McKenzie, 2016). Seeking solutions to the challenges faced by PETE and PETE educators involves consideration of this broader education landscape and a more nuanced understanding of the changing nature of the modern university and the changing expectations for academics. I comment on this shortly.

**Research developments in PETE/teacher educators**

In 1985, Metzler and Freedman referred to the paucity of research in Physical Education. Thirty years on, there is a flourishing research community globally and a plethora of quality peer-reviewed journals disseminating research on Physical Education teaching and teacher education. Indeed the knowledge base for teacher education is unrecognizable in terms of quality and quantity 35 years on. I share selective developments in the paragraphs below to make my point.

A major development in PETE research was the research foci on *teacher beliefs*. In the 1990s we came to understand that shaping teacher beliefs was a critical element of the value added (or not) of any PETE program. While there was evidence that PETE programs required robust interventions to transform pre-service teacher dispositions (Matanin & Collier, 2003) this was not always evident in graduates. lisahunter and her Australian colleagues (lisahunter, 2012) evidenced the power of the school staff room on student teachers “to wash out” key learnings during teacher education and PETE programs needed to better prepare Physical Education teachers for schools contexts as a powerful (and sometimes negative) learning space. Tsangaridou’s (2006) chapter in the *Handbook on Physical Education* provided a detailed review of that literature for PETE and is as valid today as it was then.

Second, the research base on *effective principles of mentoring* prospective teachers while on school placement (i.e. teaching practice) has been well documented in the PETE literature demonstrating the impact (or not) of models of peer and tutor observation and assessment on the development of critically reflective early career teachers (O’Sullivan & Deglau, 2006). There is also a strong literature base on reflective practice and contested view about the nature and importance of critical self-reflection and reflexivity (Tsangaridou & O’Sullivan, 2003). Indeed, it could be argued that recent performance-based assessments of graduating teachers (e.g., EdTPA or its equivalent in US states) had their precursors in these types of systematic observation of Physical Education teaching practices in PETE (Parker & O’Sullivan, 1983).

A third research area was the development of *Content and Specialized Content Knowledge* in PETE. Research by Ward, Tsuda, Dervent, and Devirilez (2018) on the centrality of content and specialist content knowledge (SCK) showed that when taught explicitly during a PETE program, prospective teachers can learn to plan effective learning progressions, diagnose errors, and provide authentic feedback in support of student’s learning of motor skills and strategies. *Living the Curriculum* was another approach pioneered by Oslin and Collier (2001) and later Dillion (2012) in building simultaneously Physical Education teachers’ capabilities of content knowledge (CK), pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and assessment in time challenged PETE programs. The approach developed teachers’ CK and specific content knowledge (SCK) in strands (subject content) of the curriculum (e.g., adventure education) in an interactive and authentic learning setting. Yet, in many PETE programs, courses, or modules in physical activity content areas have all but disappeared with prospective teachers expected to have this knowledge on entry or build their knowledge base beyond the time allocation of a teacher education program.

Fourth, there have been several new pedagogies, including social media and technologies introduced to PETE in recent years (Casey, Goodyear, & Armour, 2017). Space limitations limit mention to a few interesting teacher education-specific pedagogies. Merseth (1996), an educator at Harvard was an early adopter of a *case-based approach in teacher education*. In PETE, Collier (1997) and later Timken and van Der Mars (2009) provided an evidence based for the value of case-based teaching in PETE and some resources (casebooks, pedagogical cases and videos) have been created to support this approach. The evidence suggested the approach can develop teachers’ problem setting and problem-solving skills but the resources required to sustain such an approach are significant and it has not seen widespread uptake in recent decades.
Fifth, some teacher education program now use simulations. A government-funded teacher education simulation lab in Israel has impressive evidence of simulations in building teachers’ communication skills (MOFFET, 2019). Misty Neutzling’s work with PETE students at Bridgewater State, using simulation technology to develop Physical Education student teachers’ communication skills and reflective thinking in teaching Physical Education, is impressive. It shows the potential of this approach to support prospective teachers learn a critical but difficult skillset (communication and critical thinking) and research funds are deserving to build an evidence base and resources for this innovative pedagogy in PETE.

Finally, there is a large research base on models based instructional approaches in Physical Education and PETE, including Sport Education, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility, Adventure Education, Contemporary Studies, SPARK, HOPE, and Fitness for Life. The effective application of these approaches to support prospective teachers to competently use these models is varied in PETE but a discussion on reasons would require more space that is available. This description of research developments in PETE is just a small sample of a significant body of work currently guiding the development of teacher education programs. How this research is applied in reality is the focus of the next section.

**Current challenges: voices of teacher educators**

All is not well in some PETE communities, but more so in the USA and English PETE communities. Globally, as teacher education struggles from a shortage of qualified teachers Ayers and Richards (2019) completed an analysis of current USA PETE recruitment and retention challenges making a series of recommendations for USA PETE community. The monograph makes for interesting reading and I support their call for more comparative research of PETE programs as a basis for possible recommendations for USA PETE (and elsewhere).

In this section, I share some findings from our teacher education comparative research study where we sought the perspectives of 29 experienced Physical Education teacher educators across the USA, Europe, and Australasia (O’Sullivan et al., 2018) about their work as teacher educators and researchers in the modern university. These teachers educators (though in quite difference educational systems) highlighted four common challenges impacting their work as teacher educators/scholars. Our research built on research by Irish teacher education colleagues (Gleeson, Sugrue, & O’Flaherty, 2017; MacPhail & O’Sullivan, 2019) and former PETE doctoral students (Enright et al., 2017; McEvoy, Heikinajo-Johansson, & MacPhail, 2018).

**PETE positioning in the neoliberal university**

To understand the challenges facing PETE academics and units, one must first understand the context and appreciate the positioning of teacher education in modern universities (not all universities are the same!). The concept of a Neo-liberal university reflects the university as a market-driven system, with modes of governance based on a corporate model (Ball, 2012). This ideology has transformed many English speaking and western universities in recent years with the creation of unit-based budgeting, market-driven programming, increasing competition (marketing) for students, decreased state funding and with increased expectations for academics to fund their research and graduate students. John Furlong (2013) a prominent UK scholar has written about the struggle for the centrality of teacher education as a key agenda for the university sector (a struggle mostly lost in many English universities). The Sport Pedagogy/Teacher Education early career academics (ECAs) studied by Enright and her colleagues described how they had experienced crises of habitus as they worked to suppress their own ethical dispositions and values and adjust to “the rules” by which they felt they were expected to play (Enright et al., 2017). Their findings identify the desires of early career academics to construct new and different academic identities carved and crafted not by market priorities but by sound ethics, intellectual curiosity and rigor, care for self, colleagues, students, and their field of inquiry. However, achieving such goals in many universities at present can happen only if the early career academics capacities and interests align with the values and priorities of the department, school and/or faculty in which they reside (O’Sullivan & Penny, 2013).

In our comparative research of international teacher educators, one UK PETE scholar from a research-intensive university noted the shift in priorities for their PETE academic staff and the centrally of teacher education moved to the margins:

The whole reason that our particular institution existed at one point in time was because of the physical education program. Now the physical education program is part of the university [with] 24 degree programs in the School . . . . The priorities and the prioritization of ITE isn’t there . . . . We’re just insignificant (Research Intensive University, UK).

In his AERA Scholar Lecture, Kirk (2014) recognized the challenges for teacher education in English universities in particular and encouraged sport pedagogy faculty to leave Colleges of Education and move to Kinesiology units noting they have the scholarly skills and capacities to be successful in these units. Kirk highlighted the changing conditions for success in academia and where PETE academics would be best
positioned in the modern university to ensure a productive environment and a successful career (i.e. promotion). Among our international teacher educator cohort, they described how the positioning of PETE in the university structure has become must more contested and in many cases divisions among scholars of Kinesiology and education. Several US scholars described the lack of support for PETE in Kinesiology units because PETE was not aligned with senior administrators’ agendas: a similar situation described well by a UK PETE educator: “We were in a College of Health and the Dean ... wanted [the unit] to be a School of Public Health. Clearly physical education didn’t fit in her plans ... pedagogy wasn’t getting a whole lot of support.” (UK teacher educator).

There have been some unintended consequences in the USA for PETE in the renaming of College Departments/Schools from Physical Education/Sport and Exercise Sciences (to mention just two names) to Kinesiology. Some readers will recall the robust academic debates of the late 1980s ending with Kinesiology chosen as an overarching label for our field in the USA (Newell, 1990). There was a strongly held view that the field of study needed a broader label to market to students the opportunity to study PA from multiple perspectives. Most units in the USA have renamed their units to Kinesiology. A consequence (mostly unintended I suspect) has been to make applied study of sport including Physical Education teacher qualification less attractive.

Thomas (2014), then Dean of Education at the University of North Texas noted the adoption of Kinesiology as a unifying name has strong scientific underpinnings and the name change has paralleled a substantial growth in undergraduate majors, (he estimated more than a 50% increase from 2003–2008). Thomas also noted Kinesiology in the USA is now the preferred major for academic preparation in allied health fields such as physical therapy and physicians’ assistant programs. However, he warned such a growth has come at a cost to other programs in Kinesiology units. Thomas noted as a result of these changes less interest among undergraduate majors in teacher education and athletic training. It is reasonable to argue that trends come and go in what undergraduate majors’ interests and what they might choose to study and unit leadership must planned for this volatility. However, in the USA, Thomas warned of a critical turn in enrollment trends with the potential to make some Kinesiology related programs no longer viable. The shrinking enrollment in teacher education most generally and Physical Education more specifically was commented on by several USA teacher educators in our interviews with experienced teacher educators. The shift in undergraduate students’ interests and how it has affected this USA teacher education program’s enrollment is captured by this teacher educator; “We have 500 in our kinesiology program and so we bring in about 125 every year. About 8 out of 125 (are physical education). I used to have 30 when I first started ...” (USA teacher educator).

Thomas (2014) shared data from his Texas kinesiology unit which showed a similar trend and he voiced concern that interest not just in teacher education and but even the most traditional focus on sport and exercise more generally may be lost in these larger and more diverse Kinesiology configurations: “In a department of 1600 students, 14% do Physical Education, 77% do an allied health degree ... Should we be aligned to Public Health? ... Challenge: Will sport/exercise interest be lost?” (p.319). These data at least should give us pause to consider how much traditional Physical Education units have diversified and now reflect an allied health public health suite of programs with little interest among students or expertise among staff for issues of teaching young children about sport and physical activity as part of an educational enterprise.

**University rankings and the dual economy of teacher education**

In 1985, Metzler and Freedman described the typical PETE professor as a “Jack of all trades.” Their teacher educator profiles revealed that most USA Physical Education teacher educators devoted small amounts of time to graduate teaching (7.0%), and even less time to research and writing (3.1%), and preparing grant proposals (0.9%). About 70% of the PETE teacher educators at that time reported no time spent in active research. Indeed, the low involvement in research and in graduate teaching reflected the personal preferences of most of the surveyed PETE faculty. This must be contrasted with PETE positioning in modern university where academics have seen a shift in recent decades from a focus on teaching to significant expectations for research productivity and research grant success. The prominent US teacher educator Marilyn Cochran Smith has lauded the research-based approach to teacher education and the development of teachers as research producers are now presented as a priority for teacher education suggesting that teacher education must be research-based with teacher educators as active researchers and perceived as “public intellectuals” (Cochran-Smith, 2004; European Commission, 2015). These raised research expectations for PETE teacher educators were highlighted by this PETE scholar and
they feared it was at the expense of providing quality teacher education programs: “The university is only interested now in its world-leading research agenda. ITE [PETE] does not fit with that [agenda].” (Research Intensive University UK PETE teacher educator)

A “dual economy” in the teacher education, as articulated by Christie and Menter (2009), described a phenomenon where some academic staff are primarily teacher educators and others are primarily researchers. Yet this had resulted in many teacher educators experiencing tension between the two forms of academic activity expected of them in the workplace (Christie & Menter, 2009).

PETE faculty have also struggled to adjust to this shift in university priorities as clearly noted by this PETE scholar we interviewed at a research-intensive university in New Zealand:

You need to be research active ... That’s quite a cultural shift. When [new Dean] arrived, I remember ... he said something like “I have 52 publications and 3 in [high impact journal] ... As cultural capital, it meant nothing [to us]. Someone said “but have you taught? Which was our cultural capital. What are we going to value, can you teach?

A leading US teacher educator Ken Zeichner, questions whether the US research-intensive institution is a good place to do teacher education? Such a sentiment was echoed by a number of US PETE scholars in our research study with one noting that this issue has: “been raised by a number of the deans of the college ... Within that it has filtered down to the impact in PETE; our PETE program significantly.” (USA PETE educator). I have written elsewhere about the sustained harsh critique of teacher education internationally coupled with rising expectations for research while teacher education staff also expected to build sustained partnerships in schools around teacher education (MacPhail & O’Sullivan, 2019; O’Sullivan & Penny, 2013). There is the emergence of a “survival strategy” among emerging scholars to strategically redefine their interests and move away from teacher education research and, in some cases from membership of departments of education.

This phenomenon was commented on by the experienced teacher educators in our study with a leading Australian Physical Education teacher education scholar describing the challenge for PETE faculty but for early career PETE academics in particular:

The research demands are almost overwhelming for some people ... the waves of academics that now come into it (PETE) are probably more attuned to it ... they know how to build their career. They are better at building their CV than they are doing the work (PETE).

The student experience, deregulation, and PETE

Research from Australian sport pedagogy scholars is instructive as to the impact of the deregulation of universities on student enrollments in teacher education and sport and exercise science more generally. In Australia, deregulation policy means universities can set their own fees as well as the number of places they offer for programs (a somewhat similar issue in the UK). A large prestigious Australian university commissioned research, when the deregulation debate was at its peak, to determine if undergraduate students would still choose their university when premium fees were applied to registration at a research-intensive university.

The findings from this internal report as they related to Kinesiology were commented on by this Australian Sport Pedagogy colleague:

The Students in exercise science and teacher education were not the students prepared to pay a premium price to come to a research intensive university like the University of XXXX. [In contrast] law students were prepared to pay [premium fees] ... In fact the Kinesiology students and PETE students were ... quite savvy in thinking that their return on investment wasn’t going to be as high.

The same university was also worried also about student litigation in this new deregulation environment: What might be the liability of a university if a student has paid a considerable amount to become a qualified teacher and they fail at the last hurdle? This pedagogy scholar believed these sorts of issues have the potential to impact on the continued existence of teacher education and PETE at research-intensive universities.

Accreditation and levers of power

While we could fill many journal pages with critiques of teacher accreditation and PETE accreditation processes, and some of it justified, an interesting finding from our interviews with senior Physical Education teacher educators is that there have also been positive aspects to these accreditation processes which receive little mention in the literature. More specifically where an accreditation requirement was used as an opportunity to review the content and processes of a teacher education program, the process was noted by one US pedagogue as: “highly valued ... the process has allowed us to reflect on our program in very deep and meaningful ways so that we could make adjustments and meet accreditation standards ... it is trying to find alignment.” Similarly, an Australian Physical Education teacher educators noted: “It made us ... be explicit about things that were implicit, check what we should be doing better, think about ways
that we should be filling the gaps.” Another described how they had used accreditation to their advantage with senior leadership in arguing for program resources: “You use the accreditation and the potential jeopardy of [de] accreditation to your advantage and send it to school review.” (Research Intensive University Australia).

In Ireland, policy changes to teacher education accreditation by the Teaching Council were met mostly with energy and a willingness to comply by PETE teacher educators. Many welcomed these changes, viewing the process as a time to reflect and update elements of their programs. However, the failure to resource the required changes (longer programs, new modules/courses, increased expectations around collaborative partnerships with schools in support of longer school placements) has left some frustrated, feeling “squeezed between the demands for extended school placements and ... pressures to be research active” (Gleeson et al. 2017, p. 28).

Possibilities for PETE

In addition to teacher education accreditation changes, PETE developments in Ireland reflect and support some major changes in the Irish Physical Education and Wellbeing curricula at the second level. I believe how the PETE community has facilitated and responded to these key changes at national level provide have the potential to provide some important lessons for PETE internationally. Physical Education and PETE have been invigorated in Ireland in the last decade. PETE scholars have engaged with activist Physical Education teachers and innovative government curricular leadership that has resulted in exciting new programs for school Physical Education. These programs contribute directly to the educational goals of the schooling system at the equivalent of middle and high school levels. PETE scholars were able to take advantage of the enthusiasm of a young and physically active Prime Minister and a supportive Minister of Education to ensure the centrality of physical education in the educational purpose and statements of learning (NCCA, 2017) for children in Irish second-level schooling.

The creation of the Irish Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) specification is a case in point. This is a national Physical Education curriculum program for 16–19-year-olds and for the first time is one of the high stakes assessment subjects student can take in their final 2 years of schooling. The Physical Education teaching and scholarly communities, together with government school inspectors and policymakers have maintained policy advocacy over a 25-year period around the development of a Physical Education subject option for students as part of the leaving certificate curriculum. There were multiple starts and failures before getting this senior high school examinable subject in Physical Education approved at the cabinet level. I was hugely encouraged when almost 50% of Irish secondary schools (350) applied to be part of the first phase of 70 schools to offer LCPE as an option for all students. Several schools who were finally chosen were challenged internally with picking a cohort of 25–30 16–17 year olds to take this two-year program of study given the high level of interest from students. In 40 years in PETE, I never witnessed such excitement during the launch of this LCPE program in March 2018. All the school principals, school counselors, and Physical Education teachers from the successful schools were in attendance with huge positivity around the engagement in phase one of this curricular innovation. My colleagues and I received calls at the university from parents wanting to discuss with PETE teacher education staff the benefits of their child taking this course for college entrance. This type of engagement with Physical Education as a school subject was unprecedented.

There is no shortage of Irish high school students who want to study Physical Education in senior high school, or Physical Education/Sport Sciences at the university level. There is no shortage of students who want to be Physical Education teachers (these prospective Physical Education teachers for decades have scored among the highest marks of any cohort of students entering all university programs). There is a growing interest by school principals to recruit Physical Education teachers to take leadership roles in the new School Wellbeing committees where Physical Education is a key contributor to Middle school wellbeing statements of learning. This is an example of where national education policy has impacted immediately on student choices and allocation of instructional time to Physical Education in schools. These changes to Irish Leaving Certificate secondary curriculum (with Physical Education as part of a Wellbeing learning area at Middle School level and Physical Education’s contributions to high school curriculum with a high stakes assessment and a non high stakes subject specifications) are making a difference at multiple levels of the education system. Physical Education teacher educators continue to be a central player in these developments preparing teachers for these initiatives, supporting professional development providers working with experienced teachers, and using research to inform these processes (Scanlon, MacPhail, & Calderon, 2018, 2019).

Concluding observations
Addressing local or national challenges facing PETE and the hidden profession of Physical Education teacher
educators must be informed not only by PETE research but an appreciation for the policy contexts where PETE programs and Physical Education teacher educators operate. At a policy level, PETE is part of a larger teacher education policy landscape which in turn is part of a government strategy (be it a state or federal level) for the education of its citizens. In Europe, national education and teacher education policies influence and in are influenced by the European policies and directives (European Commission, 2015). In countries like Canada, USA and Australia, state education systems are influenced in differential ways by federal policies and mandates. Physical Education teacher educators must be more critically aware of the priorities of the higher education system more generally and its potential to impact in their local contexts (e.g., university, college, school, department unit) if they are to survive and thrive as teacher educator practitioners and research-active academics in the modern university. PETE is part of a large higher education enterprise and to ignore the realities of such policies will result in failure to secure the future of PETE and thus PETE scholars in research universities.

The development of critically informed PETE and Physical Education teacher educator community is not a luxury but a necessity. The new generation of teacher educators needs not only research active and policy aware but competent practitioners who are supported by senior sport pedagogy leadership to lead innovative teacher education programs and programs of research in a university context and will support them to thrive and remain passionate about Physical Education and Physical Education teacher education. The following four observations and reflections are informed by doing and reading about teacher education across three countries over a career, researching the challenges and opportunities of Physical Education teacher educators globally (O’Sullivan & Parker, 2018), and learning from my engagement with an international teacher education community, the International Forum for Teacher Educator Development (Info-TED, https://info-ted.eu/).

First, unlike most academics, teacher educators are faced with three distinct masters in the modern university and PETE early career academics (ECA) in particular must balance the expectations of all three if they are to see their careers flourish (internal promotion, accreditation, external professional service). Teacher educators need internal cross department and university networks that can support their research and teaching ambitions and help ensure they meet university promotion criteria (master one). The state/national teacher education regulator is a second master for teacher educators. The accreditation process make demands on teacher educators to evidence how their PETE programs provide high-quality teacher education experiences for prospective Physical Education teachers that align with the current school level curriculum priorities. The accreditation process now mandates school university partnerships as part of the teacher education infrastructure but provides neither the authority nor the resources for teacher educators to deliver on this mandate. While this is a hugely time-consuming effort these school partnerships, or “third spaces” have created both opportunities and challenges (not always recognized for promotion) for teacher educators. There is another external third master for the Physical Education teacher educators. These are the professional and scholarly networks who are look to access the expertise of teacher educators to support their agendas and who in turn provide visibility to PETE scholars nationally. These include publishing houses who need pro bono academic editors and reviewers to maintain scholarly journal output, writers of professional and scholarly texts, as well as international and government agencies to curricular and professional development resources. In our interviews with international PETE academics they spoke of being “time poor” because of these differential commitments. They found themselves struggling to manage mentoring/supervision of early career teachers while sustaining school/university partnerships along with university scholarly and professional obligations to meet expectations of all three masters. Informed university leadership is a factor in supporting those PETE teacher educators who manage credible and sustainable programs. This can allow for a professional quality of life for Physical Education teacher educators and continue to attract quality sport pedagogy scholars to PETE. Our findings suggested many prospective teacher educators are seeking more sustainable ways to flourish within the university away from the multiple and competing demands of teacher education.

My second observation relates to where PETE programs reside within the academic governance structure of the university. While many academic battles have been waged and much written about where PETE best resides, my view is that this is often less relevant to the sustainability of the PETE program that the leadership issues noted above. A key element for the success of a PETE program is if the academic leaders (if whatever unit) understand the work demands of teacher education/PETE academics, value the contribution of teacher education to the departmental/school unit, and are effective advocates for teacher education with university leadership. Members of the PETE unit must be able/allowed to exert leadership with departmental leadership where Physical Education teacher education is supported within the budgetary and career promotion frameworks. If the differential demands (i.e. masters) on teacher educators as practitioners and scholars are appreciated
by departmental leaders, they can align resources to service these needs. This is the critical factor for teacher educators and more important to the sustainability of teacher education programs that where in the university governance structure the program is situated (e.g. in Colleges of Arts and Sciences, in Education, in Allied Health, or Health Sciences).

Third, the recent diversity of Kinesiology Departments has been important to the field’s sustainability in the university sector (the inclusion of allied health and public health majors in addition to exercise science, athletic training, and physical education majors). This diversity has led departments to shift away from traditional majors of Physical Education, Athletic Training to what one administrator has noted as a potential tipping point within Kinesiology departments. There is evidence in the USA to suggest student interest in health-related programs is now greater in Kinesiology departments than an interest in sport or Physical Education related programs. Thomas (2014), a leader of a Kinesiology department cautions how the current leadership of these programs (often scholars with little or no connection to the traditional professional degrees of sport and Physical Education) may not see the viability of these degrees over time. To counter this, Thomas (2014) suggested no one academic program (e.g. Nutrition, Allied Health, Sport Psychology, Sport Sociology, Sport Pedagogy) at doctoral level should be allowed to dominate in US Kinesiology units. Thomas argued if such domination were to happen, units may not recruit/have the staff in the longer term to educate the next generation of Physical Education Professionals, Fitness Leaders or Athletic Therapists. Could what is happening in PETE in the USA might be an early warning signal for other Kinesiology programs elsewhere?

My final observation is to support the research agenda for PETE focused on how we prepare better teachers to work as agents of change in contemporary schools. This agenda requires cross-disciplinary collaborations among Kinesiology/Human Movement Sciences scholars. It has implications for how teacher educators/sport pedagogy scholars must collaborate with Kinesiology scholars interested in researching young people’s physical education and physical literacy. Here are some examples of potential collaborations by sport pedagogy scholars with Kinesiology colleagues:

1. working with physical activity and health scholars to understand how we better teach and embed a sense of behavior change in our PETE program, in curriculum and practice in schools and building autonomous and supportive Physical Education classrooms

2. working with motor learning colleagues to ensure teachers understand how a skill is learned and refined and rehabilitated

3. Working across education sub fields like sociology and curriculum assessment among others, we can tackle questions like “What pedagogies do teacher education students need to develop the 21st century skills and knowledge base of an educated student?”

Physical Education teacher education in many universities in the USA and England has faced significant resourcing challenges in recent years though for some different reasons. The changing nature of the university has faced significant resourcing challenges in recent years though for some different reasons. The changing nature of the university has placed increased pressure on what some call the “hidden profession” of teacher educators with the dual economy of their workload within the university (research and teaching/supervision) and increased pressure to also engage with school partnerships, teacher professional development, and policy work beyond the university. A consequence of these developments has been somewhat of a paradox for the sport pedagogy academic community. On the one hand there is a worldwide cohort of highly trained and research active sport pedagogy scholars yet a reluctance by many of them to engage in the practice of teacher education because of the frustrations in managing competing and multiple demands of the role as I referred to above. To compound this, US departments now have more undergraduate students in Kinesiology departments favoring public health majors than the traditional sport and physical education majors. There have been knock on effects on staffing levels and resources to support PETE programs making the professional lives of Physical Education teacher educators even more challenging.

The future of PETE and a thriving teacher educator community of scholars demands greater engagement with education policy at both school and university level. Sport pedagogy scholars must support the development of exciting and educationally meaningful Physical Education programs for young people in schools. The Irish example shows that when this is done it will excite students who will be the next generation of Physical Education teachers. Meanwhile, teacher education leadership at the university level must be educated to advocate for PETE within the larger context of teacher education and university policy directives. This is the responsibility of Physical Education scholars and practitioners alike. To avoid such engagement is to condemn PETE to diminished status in the modern university.

Acknowledgments

I thank the Research Consortium for the invitation to deliver the 2019 McCloy Lecture at SHAPE Conference, Florida.
I also acknowledge the assistance of Drs Ann MacPhail, Melissa Parker, and Deborah Tannehill who collaborated with me in interviewing a cohort of experienced teacher educators worldwide.

ORCID

Mary O’Sullivan  http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6429-7427

References


Teacher Education Policy in Europe (TEPE), Limerick, Ireland.


